

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 MBABANE 1907

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, WZ
SUBJECT: TRADITIONALIST (TRIBAL) DOMINANCE OF SWAZILAND
POLITICAL PROCESS

REF: MBABANE A-26

HEREWITH SUMMARY OF REFAIR, WHICH IS FIRST IN-DEPTH
EXAMINATION OF SWAZILAND'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION SINCE
KING'S SUSPENSION OF CONSTITUTION AND PARLIAMENT IN
APRIL 1973. SUBSEQUENT PERIOD HAS SEEN CREATION OF
SERIOUS, POTENTIALLY REVOLUTIONARY TENSIONS CAUSED BY
TRADITIONAL (TRIBAL) DOMINANCE IN THIS SMALL BUT GEOGRAPHICALLY
SIGNIFICANT SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRY. QUOTE

BACKGROUND.

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IN THE PERIOD LEADING TO INDEPENDENCE
SWAZILAND GRADUALLY DEVELOPED A DUAL GOVERNMENT
STRUCTURE. THE FIRST PART WAS THE FORMAL WESTERN-
STYLE PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY (ENDED BY THE KING
IN 1973). THE LONG EXISTANT SECOND PART WAS THE SWAZI
NATIONAL COUNCIL, DOMINATED BY THE KING. IN THEORY
THE COUNCIL ONLY DEALS WITH TRIBAL MATTERS, BUT IT

HAS ALWAYS HAD A STRONG VOICE IN MODERN GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS. ONCE SOBHUZA SWEPT AWAY THE WESTERN-STYLE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL BECAME THE DE FACTO RULING BODY OF SWAZILAND. WHILE THE FACT OF A DUAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE DOMINATED BY TRADITIONALIST FORCES HAS LONG BEEN RECOGNIZED, THE METHODS BY WHICH THE TRADITIONALISTS MAINTAIN THEIR POWER HAS BEEN DIFFICULT FOR OUTSIDERS AND EVEN MOST SWAZIS TO DEFINE.

THE KEY HAS BEEN KING SOBHUZA. USING HIS ASSURED POWER BASE AS THE ABSOLUTE TRIBAL MONARCH IN A ONE-TRIBE COUNTRY, SOBHUZA SUSPENDED THE CONSTITUTION AND PARLIAMENT IN 1973 AFTER HIS PARTY LOST THREE OF THE 24 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY A SERIES OF DECREES GIVING THE KING-IN-COUNCIL VIRTUAL DICTATORIAL POWERS. TRADE UNIONS AND THE NATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATION WERE SUPPRESSED, A DRACONIAN DETENTION LAW WAS ENACTED, AND A NEW CITIZENSHIP LAW, SIFFICIENTLY VAGUE TO DEPRIVE VIRTUALLY ANYONE OF SWAZI CITIZENSHIP, WAS PUT INTO FORCE. OTHER SECTIONS OF THE MODERN SECTOR THAT HAD GENERALLY BACKED THE OPPOSITION PARTY, SUCH AS THE POLICE, BUREAUCRACY, TEACHERS, AND BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS, WERE BROUGHT UNDER INFORMAL BUT INCREASING TRADITIONALIST CONTROL. THIS SITUATION HAS LED TO CONFIDENTIAL

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SERIOUS, POTENTIALLY REVOLUTIONARY TENSIONS JUST BELOW THE SURFACE OF SWAZILAND SOCIETY.

FOREIGN POLICY.

THE AREA THAT POTENTIALLY HAS THE GREATEST IMPACT ON USG INTERESTS IN THE REGION IS SWAZILAND'S FOREIGN POLICY AND RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENTS.

SWAZILAND IS FORCED BY ECONOMIC, TRANSPORTATION, AND POLITICAL REALITIES INTO MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH BOTH OF ITS DISPARATE NEIGHBORS, WHITE- RULED SOUTH AFRICA AND BLACK-RULED MARXIST MOZAMBIQUE. HOWEVER, THE GOS MAKES LITTLE EFFORT TO DISASSOCIATE ITSELF FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND HAS BEEN EAGERLY STRENGTHENING THEIR ECONOMIC TIES. THE MAJOR REASON FOR THIS IS THAT THE REACTIONARY MONARCHY/TRADITIONALIST STRUCTURE HAS THE SAME ENEMIES THAT THE SAG HAS -- YOUNG RADICAL BLACKS WHO WANT TO OVERTURN THE STATUS QUO.

IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE REAST OF

BLACK AFRICA, SWAZILAND HAS ALLOWED ITS TERRITORY TO
BECOME A MAJOR EXIT AND RE-ENTRY ROUTE FOR LIBERATION
MOVEMENT MEMBERS SUBJECT TO TWO RESTRICTIONS. FIRST,
SWAZIS ARE NOT TO BE RECRUITED; AND, SECONDLY, CAMPS,
(WHICH WOULD INVITE SAG INTERVENTION) NOT BE OPENED.
AS LONG AS SOBHUZA REMAINS ON THE THRONE, THIS POLICY
WILL BE MAINTAINED. HOWEVER, HIS SUCCESSOR IS GOING
TO BE SUBJECT TO INCREASED PRESSURE TO ALLOW LIBERA-
TION MOVEMENTS A HIGHER LEVEL OF ACTIVITY. THE TRADITIONALIST
SECTOR, WHICH IS BASICALLY UNINTERESTED IN POLITICAL
AFFAIRS IN RSA, WILL CONTINUE TO URGE THAT SWAZILAND
REMAIN UNINVOLVED. THE KEY GROUP WILL BE THE MODERN
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PROGRESSIVE SWAZIS WHO WILL SYMPATHIZE WITH THE
LIBERATION MOVEMENTS BUT STILL NOT WANT TO SEE
SWAZILAND BECOME A "FRONTLINE STATE."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 MBABANE 1907

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

THE ARMY.

THE ROYAL SWAZILAND DEFENSE FORCE (UMBUTFO) WAS CREATED IN 1973 AFTER THE KING HAD SECRETLY ALERTED THE TRADITIONAL REGIMENTS (ARMED WITH CLUBS AND SPEARS) TO BE PREPARED FOR MILITARY ACTION IF VIOLENCE SHOULD OCCUR AS A RESULT OF THE POLITICAL CRISES SURROUNDING THE SUSPENSION OF PARLIAMENT.

A RELATIVE OF THE KING, MAPHEVU DLAMINI WHO WAS THE ROYAL STOCK INSPECTOR, WAS MADE COLONEL-IN-CHIEF DESPITE HIS TOTAL LACK OF MILITARY EXPERIENCE. THERE IS A WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION THAT THE ARMY WAS CREATED AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE POLICE, WHO ARE NOT ENTIRELY TRUSTED BY THE TRADITIONALISTS.

IT IS DOUBTFUL IF EVEN MAPHEVU, (WHO WAS APPOINTED CONFIDENTIAL

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PRIMIN IN 1976) DELUDES HIMSELF INTO THINKING THAT THAT THE UMBUTFO COULD PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN ANY SOUTHERN AFRICAN UPHEAVAL. HOWEVER, THE ARMY CAN BE THE INSTRUMENT BY WHICH THE ROYAL SUCCESSION IS ASSURED. WITH APPROXIMATELY 1,500 MEN, IT WILL BE LARGE ENOUGH TO PROTECT THE ROYAL FAMILY MEMBERS AND ROYAL KRAALS IN THE EVENT OF DISTURBANCES, AND TO GARRISON KEY POINTS AROUND SWAZILAND, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS.

GOVERNMENT AND BUREAUCRACY.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE KING AND NATIONAL COUNCIL ARE AN INFORMAL BUT INTEGRAL PART OF THE GOS AND THE GOVERNING PROCESS. THE DIMENSIONS OF THE KING'S PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT ARE UNCLEAR BUT THE SYSTEM HE HAS ALLOWED TO EVOLVE HAS CREATED A NEAR PARALYSIS IN POLICY-MAKING AND AN INCREASINGLY OBVIOUS BREAKDOWN IN THE ABILITY OF THE GOS TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY AND RESPONSIBLY.

THE PRIMIN (WHO SPENDS MOST OF HIS TIME ON ARMY MATTERS) IS UNABLE TO CONTROL CABINET AS EACH MINISTER IS ABLE TO APPEAL OVER HIS HEAD TO THE KING. EACH MINISTER IS ABLE TO FOLLOW HIS OWN POLICIES SO LONG AS HE INFORMS THE KING OF THE GOALS. THIS HAS LED TO GROWING LEVELS OF CONFUSION AND CORRUPTION. THE MINISTERS, WHO ARE GENERALLY MEMBERS OF THE SWAZI NATIONAL COUNCIL, ARE THE KEY LINKS BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL AND MODERN SECTORS. IT IS THEY WHO MUST CONVINCE THE

NATIONAL COUNCIL THAT THE GROWING NUMBER OF OUT-
LANDISH ECONOMIC SCHEMES (OIL REFINERY, INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT, SHIPPING LINE, ETC.) ARE FOR THE GOOD OF
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THE NATION.

THE BUREAUCRACY, WHICH WAS A MAJOR CENTER OF SUP-
PORT FOR THE OPPOSITION PARTY, IS RIDDLED WITH
POLICE INFORMERS AND OPERATES IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF
SUSPICION AND DISTRUST. THERE IS WIDESPREAD
RESENTMENT OVER ROYAL FAMILY NEPOTISM AMONG CIVIL
SERVANTS DUE TO THE GOS' PROVIDING JOBS FOR MANY
OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KING'S ESTIMATED 110 WIVES.

THE LEGAL SYSTEM.

THE SWAZILAND LEGAL SYSTEM IS
COMPOSED OF TRADITIONAL SWAZI NATION COURTS AND
WESTERN-STYLE MAGISTRATE COURTS. THERE HAS BEEN
A GRADUAL INCREASE IN THE SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE OF
THE TRADITIONAL COURTS, WHICH IN THEORY ARE ONLY
TO DEAL WITH TRIBAL AFFAIRS. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT
AREA IS MUTI (RITUAL) MURDER, WHICH SEEMS TO BE
ON THE INCREASE. MANY OF THESE CASES NOW GO TO
THE TRADITIONAL COURTS TO BE TREATED AS A TRIBAL
OFFENSE RATHER THAN AS HOMICIDE. THE GOS CANNOT
MOVE TO GENUINELY ATTACK MUTI-MURDER AS IT IS
INHERENTLY PART OF THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE.

ROYAL SWAZILAND POLICE-RSP.

THE RSP, WHICH HAS AN EXCELLENT REPUTATION, HAS UNDERGONE A
SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN MORALE DUE, IN PART, TO GRIEVANCES
OVER PAY AND WORKING CONDITIONS. THE POLICE FORCE
IS NOT ENTIRELY TRUSTED BY THE TRADITIONAL SECTOR
AND THE KING HAS TWICE PUBLICLY ALLUDED TO UNSPECIFIED
"SINISTER MOTIVES" BEHIND SOME POLICE ACTIONS. RSP
MORALE HAS ALSO BEEN DAMAGED BY POLICE AWARENESS OF
HIGH-LEVEL CORRUPTION AND THEIR INABILITY TO DO ANY-
THING ABOUT IT SO LONG AS THE SUSPECT HAS THE BACK-
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ING OF THE KING. ANOTHER FACTOR MAY BE THE RESTRIC-
TIONS PLACED ON POLICE IN HANDLING LIBERATION MOVE-
MENT MEMBERS FOUND IN SWAZILAND ILLEGALLY CARRYING

ARMS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 MBABANE 1907

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

EDUCATION.

THE FIELD OF EDUCATION OFFERS THE CLEAREST EXAMPLE
OF GOS INEFFICIENCY AND POLICY-MAKING PARALYSIS.
TODAY, TEN YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE,
SWAZILAND STILL HAS THE SAME BRITISH-
STYLE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WHICH IS BASICALLY A LIBERAL
ARTS EDUCATION AND PROVIDES FEW PRACTICAL SKILLS.
TO MAKE MATTERS EVEN WORSE, THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE
OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM HAS BEEN DISMAL. FAR
MORE PARTIALLY EDUCATED YOUTHS LEAVE SCHOOL EVERY
YEAR THAN CAN POSSIBLY BE ABSORBED INTO THE WAGE
ECONOMY. THESE YOUTHS ARE UNWILLING TO REMAIN IN
THE KRAAL AND DRIFT TO THE URBAN SQUATTER SETTLE-
MENTS. THE GOS HAS NO PLANS WHATEVER FOR COPING WITH
THIS PROBLEM.

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THE TEACHERS' STRIKE AND RESULTING STUDENT RIOTS OF OCTOBER 1977 WERE OVER GRIEVANCES WHICH THE GOS HAD AGREED TO REMEDY 16 MONTHS EARLIER AND ABOUT WHICH IT HAD DONE NOTHING. THIS WAS THE FIRST SPLIT BETWEEN THE KING AND MUCH OF THE TRADITIONALIST RURAL POPULATION WHO SUPPORTED THE TEACHERS.

ANOTHER MAJOR IRRITATION AMONG SWAZIS IS THE INEQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF GOS AND SWAZI NATION SCHOLARSHIPS. THE GOS SCHOLARSHIPS ARE GIVEN ON A MIXED CRITERIA OF FAMILY CONNECTIONS AND MERIT WHILE THE SWAZI NATION SCHOLARSHIPS INVARIABLY GO ONLY TO MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.

CONCLUSION.

SOBHUZA, BY STAKING HIS PRESTIGE AND POWER OF THE SUCCESS OF HIS OWN POLITICAL PARTY, DESTROYED ANY OPPORTUNITY OF A "LOYAL OPPOSITION." HE SUPPRESSED OR ENDED ANY MODERN INSTITUTION THAT THREATENED HIS TRIBAL-BASED RULE. SOBHUZA IS NOW TRYING TO GET AROUND THIS SITUATION WITH THE CREATION OF A TRIBAL-BASED CONSULTATIVE SYSTEM (CALLED TINKHUNDLA) TO REPLACE THE WESTERN-STYLE ELECTIONS AND PARTIES BANNED FIVE YEARS AGO.

IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE SYSTEM WILL LONG SURVIVE SOBHUZA'S DEATH -- BUT WHAT WILL EMERGE TO REPLACE IT IS FAR FROM CLEAR. ONE POSSIBILITY IS THAT THE PRIMIN WITH THE BACKING OF THE ARMY AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL WOULD OVERSEE THE INSTALLATION OF A PUPPET KING (OR REGENT, IN CASE OF AN ADOLESCENT KING).

IF A KING EMERGES WHO INTENDS TO GENUINELY RULE, HE
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WILL LACK SOBHUZA'S TREMEMDOUS AUTHORITY AND POWER. MODERN SECTOR ELEMENTS, WHO HAVE LONG SUPPRESSED THEIR DISSENT, WILL BEGIN TO PRESSURE THE NEW MONARCH OR REGENT FOR CHANGE. IF THE KING IS WILLING TO LISTEN, AND ACT, IT WOULD GO FAR TOWARDS DEFUSING THE SITUATION AND PERHAPS PAVE THE WAY EVENTUALLY FOR A DECENTRALIZATION OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. IF THE NEW KING FAILS TOLISTEN, OR ATTEMPTS TO COMMAND OBEDIENCE AS SOBHUZA DID, SWAZILAND WILL BE HEADED INTO A PERIOD OF SEVERE SOCIAL TENSION AND CHANGE AND PERHAPS REVOLUTION.
UNQUOTE.
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